

THE LEONARD AND BINA ELLEN ART GALLERY TODAY

1. Mandate, Vision Statement, Role and Positioning

MANDATE

The Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery at Concordia University is committed to researching, exhibiting, documenting and disseminating contemporary art in a local, national and international context. The history of contemporary art is also examined from the viewpoint of its relevance today. Through its exhibitions, its educational and public programs and its publications the Gallery promotes to the public, students and art communities a greater awareness of art as a critical form of knowledge and as a way to engage in larger cultural debates. The Gallery collects Canadian art.

VISION STATEMENT

The Leonard & Bina Ellen Art Gallery produces and promotes a stimulating environment in the form of exhibitions in which students, the art community and the general public can explore the ever changing parameters of contemporary artistic practice, curating, critical writing, mediation and collecting. Its location within the learning and research environment of the university makes the Gallery an ideal context to effectively communicate to visitors that artmaking is a form of research, and a way of thinking and of being in the world. It continues to build on the successful dialogue that it has recently established with the art community, the general public, students, and a growing number of institutional collaborators both nationally and internationally.

ROLE

The Gallery is an increasingly important presence in both the local and national art community and within the university. As a place where both local, national and international professional artists and curators are featured it functions as a window that brings *into* Concordia the larger presence of the art world. Given the profile and presence at Concordia of the Faculty of Fine Arts it is important that the university has a gallery that is a focal point for the larger debates in the contemporary art world. In this way it serves as a conduit to give students access to research material and to provide them with experiences that are unique in their nature and, that can enrich their experience at this university as well as further develop their critical faculty. Its role for the general public and art community is no less crucial. Because it is within an institution of higher learning that emphasizes research and excellence, it has an equally important role in being *out there*, in sharing its research with fellow curators and directors, and in educating the public as to the role of art, curating, mediation and writing today. The LBEAG is an effective and unique means of promoting the innovative educational and research environment of Concordia University in Montréal and beyond.

POSITION IN THE COMMUNITY

As a university art gallery the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery situates itself between the larger museums in Montreal (MMFA and MAC) and the smaller artist run centers (Optica, Dazibao, Skol, Oboro etc.). Its offers programming that is distinctive from both these types of institutions. It features artists and issues that are not addressed by these other organizations but that are nevertheless of interest to students, the art community and the public. It also is developing a unique stream in its programming that addresses practices and currents of historical importance to contemporary art today (conceptual art, minimalism and performance art). It is progressively increasing its repertoire of publications so as to create documents that have an important referential value. University art galleries offer a unique knowledge-based approach to the experience of art. In a city where universities form a significant pole of attraction and are shaping cultural expectations in many ways the LBEAG is creating its own unique context.

HISTORY

The history of the Leonard & Bina Ellen Gallery is linked to the creation of a collection for the university. In 1962, Montreal businessman Samuel Schechter set up a fund to be used for the purchase of Canadian art for Sir George Williams University. Three years later, he would go on to create another collection, this time at Loyola College. When Sir George Williams University and Loyola College merged in 1974 under the name Concordia their respective collections were also combined together. The first gallery called Sir George Williams Art Galleries was opened in 1966 in the Hall Building. It was renamed Concordia Art Gallery in 1984. In 1992, the Gallery was relocated in the newly constructed McConnell library complex and inaugurated as the Leonard and Bina Ellen Art Gallery in honour of important benefactors to the University.

In 2000 the Gallery previously under the Faculty of Fine Arts was moved to the Office of the President. Its programming had two axis: one directed towards contemporary Canadian art with a focus on Concordia based artists and touring exhibitions of Canadian artists. The other axis was Canadian historical art which reflected the interest of the Art History Department. In 2003 an external director was hired and the mandate was subsequently modified to focus more exclusively on contemporary art and for the first time opened up to international productions and practices. The collecting activities of the Gallery were suspended in the summer of 2003 in order to resolve environmental and storage problems and to review the Gallery's acquisition policy.

2. Overview of developments and achievements since 2003

A. CURATORIAL ORIENTATION

Since 2004 the Gallery has modified its curatorial direction to focus exclusively on contemporary art and on recent contemporary history. New programming began in the fall of 2004 with the exhibition *Timelength* that marked a change in the Gallery's profile. The exhibition served as a bridge between local, national and international environments.

Our exhibition program is strongly articulated around the question of curatorial practice. We believe that our role as a university art Gallery is to encourage and foreground the critical dimension of curating and that all projects should be considered within that framework. We also wish to acknowledge the determining influence of the curator, and be a place where independent curators and their continuously shifting approaches can be discussed and tested out. Until now our collaborations have been primarily with local curatorial practices believing it is important to strengthen our presence on a local level as well as to establish strong bonds with that community. Recently, however we have also worked with international curators such as the American Catherine Morris who has developed a practice around curating documents in relation to the ephemeral art production of the 60s and 70s. We have worked with and are working with emerging curators (Nathalie de Blois, Mathieu Beauséjour, Robin Simpson and Pavillion Project, Christof Migone, Nathalie Garneau), with more established curators (Andrew Hunter, Nicole Gingras, Marie Fraser, Catherine Morris, Michèle Thériault), and also with artist curators (Mathieu Beauséjour, Christof Migone) because of the singularity of their approaches. We have also created a Visiting Curator of Contemporary Art residency that is linked to the production of two projects/events over a two year period and a publication that gives an independent curator the means to develop, over a long term, a project of his or her choice (in 2005-06 Nicole Gingras produced a two part project/event/concert on sound and its traces [*Tracking the Traces I and II*] with the production of a book on the subject (*Traces*); in 2007-08 the artist Christof Migone is working on notions of rhythmicity in art in a series of displays and performances called *StartStop*).

All of our exhibitions address artistic practices and issues in the context of a reflexive approach to curating, and they do so always by referring to the physical space of the Gallery. Questions which shape our programming include: how effective is the white cube gallery today? how can working this kind of environment be relevant? how does it interface with the black box and video, film and time based environments? How does the presence of sound affect viewer experience in our gallery etc.? Such questions are further explored in our publication and education programs.

It is important that we produce a context and an experience from a viewpoint that has not been addressed, or is lacking, in Montreal. For instance the exhibition *L'Écho des limbes* addressed the renewed presence of the unconscious in a new generation of local artists (Michael A. Robinson, David Altmejd, Patrice Duhamel, Eve K. Tremblay); *La Tête au ventre* delved into notions of the grotesque and bodily excess in the work of Québec artists Alain Benoit, Louis Fortier, Myriam Laplante and Claude Perreault. The gallery also engages with the work of mature artists whose singular experimental practice has been ignored or forgotten (e.g. Tim Clark's performance and installation activity of the 70s and 80s) or need to be examined from another viewpoint (Claude Tousignant). We have also begun to work with non Canadian artists as participants in group shows (de Rijke/de Rooij and Warhol in *Timelength*; Lynn Pook, Dominique Petitgand, Edith Dekyndt, Leif Elggren, Mika Tanilaa and Mika Vainio, American experimental artists of the 60s: Rauschenberg, Y. Rainer, D. Hay; L. Childs, J. Cage, D.Tudor et al in *9 Evenings*) or in solo shows (*Walid Raad and the Atlas Group*; the filmmaker *Harun Farocki*). We have chosen them because of their relevance and importance to our curatorial orientation, to this university, to local practices and in relation to their absence in other institutional programming. Such an approach has been very successful in terms of public attendance and interest. Working with international artists is giving us access to a whole other network of galleries and curators in the U.S. and Europe. These contacts benefit the Gallery, the University and local artists by providing them with new research material and unusual visions of contemporary art practices.

We have also developed a unique trajectory in our programming with projects that examine the recent history of contemporary art from the 60s and 70s (e.g. *3 x 3: Flavin, Andre, Judd; 9 Evenings Reconsidered*). These have proved to be of great interest to the students and to the art community. It has demonstrated the imbrication of past experimental practices with the art of today and the need to continue to offer these kinds of historical perspectives in order to nourish contemporary debate. Future projects in that framework are *Documentary Protocols* a 3 part project over 2 years that looks at the administrative ethos in art of the late 60s and 70s, a possible Canada wide project on *Conceptualism in Canada* and another exhibition on *The Avant-Garde in Montreal: Véhicule art 1972-1982*.

The Gallery is part of a university that has an important Faculty of Fine Arts that is shaping the next generation of artists. In 2003 the Gallery announced the creation of an annual exhibition for graduating master's students in Studio Arts. The show called **Ignition** is curated by a prominent Montreal independent curator whose mandate is to select on the basis of professional criteria the very best submissions by these young artists.

Permanent collection exhibition programming is an ongoing feature of the gallery. Two exhibition series were established in 2004. They are *Collection* focusing on a body of works from our collection from a contemporary perspective

(Yves Gaucher in relation to current formalist painting; Sam Tata and Tom Gibson in relation to street photography today) and *Capsule* which teams up a writer in another field with a work in our collection (the cultural theorist Scott McFarlane and Roy Kiyooka, the Québec novelist Elise Turcotte with Joanne Tod and eventually anthropologist Jean-Guy Lacroix with General Idea).

Conscious of how crucial they are to the Gallery's growth, it has worked hard to develop a network of **programming collaborators** and partners. We actively seek out institutions and curators with which we can co-produce exhibitions and publications both on a local and international scale to supplement our CCA and CALQ funding. This was the case for *Walid Raad and the Atlas Group* which received support from FACT in Liverpool and the Sfeir-Semler Gallery in Hamburg and it will also be the case for *Harun Farocki*. "*One Image Doesn't Take The Place Of The Previous One*" which is being co-produced with the Agnes Etherington Art Center and will also involve participation from the Goethe institut and the Centre d'études allemandes et européenne (Université de Montréal). *9 Evenings* received exceptional support from the Fondation Daniel Langlois and the Faculty of Engineering; *Adad Hanna. Recast and Reshoot* is organized in partnership with Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal, and *Conceptualism in Canada* is being organized with the Alberta Art Museum, Hart House and Justina Barnicke Gallery of the University of Toronto, Vancouver Art Gallery, Helen and Morris Belkin Art Gallery, Dalhousie Art Gallery.

B. COLLECTION

Acquisitions

A moratorium was declared on collecting in the summer of 2003 in order to resolve potentially destructive environmental and spatial issues and to review the acquisition policy. The environmental issue was resolved with renovation work done in the summer of 2006 and a better use of our space in the vault was achieved through the purchase of storage equipment. The acquisition policy is currently being reviewed and rewritten in order to be implemented when and if the Gallery resumes acquisition activities.

Management

A collections curator (Max Stern Curator) was hired in July 2004 and for the first time the collection had a dedicated staff member to oversee its management. Appropriate collection management software (*Collection Virtuelle*) was purchased and the entire collection inputted. Recommended by the Société des musées Québécois (SMQ) this software has put us on par with other institutions with collections thus enabling a common forum for exchange. It also has facilitated crossover research in large number of fields. A full inventory of our collection was completed in the summer of 2006 thus establishing the number of objects in our collection at 1809 (in 2003 it was estimated at 3000 !!) and allowing for the listing of our collection on CHIN (Canadian Heritage Information Network) and on Réseau Info-Muse of the SMQ.

Work began on files of stolen art works from our collection (30). By the summer of 2005 all of works loaned in the university had been repatriated and new internal and external loan policies written.

Research has begun on all donations in the collection that are certified cultural property (over 200) so as to ensure proper documentation in view of an eventual audit by the Cultural property review board. A long term photographic digitization project (over three years) has begun at the gallery this summer involving the photographing of all items in our collection for our data bank thus eventually facilitating the tracking of each work.

Work has also begun on copyright issues regarding the reproduction of works we own. Artists and estates are being contacted in order to obtain a satisfactory agreement for use of works in reproduction by the Gallery. The issues around Internet and Web site reproduction are particularly complex.

Research and dissemination

Research by the Max Stern curator is ongoing and currently consists in two exhibition series called *Collection* and *Capsule* that occur every 18 months or less and one larger scale exhibition planned for 2008.

Better management of the collection has lead to an increased effort to make the collection available to students and visiting scholars over the two years. Between September and May an increasing number of student groups from CEGEPs and from Fine Arts classes in the university have visited the vault and been informed on collection management and the nature of the collection.

Internal loans were reinstated in the fall of 2005. In June of 2007, 60 works had been installed in university offices and public spaces. Request and proposals for exhibiting works from of our collection in other areas of the university are being considered. The Gallery loans out some of its works to external exhibitions organized by other galleries and museums (e.g. the recent Jean-Paul Lemieux retrospective at the Musée national des beaux-arts de Québec and the National Gallery of Canada).

The Max Stern curator also collaborates with the Art History department on a graduate seminar to organize an exhibition on a specific topic at FOFA gallery that takes place in the fall since 2005. The curator has participated in two symposia at the MMFA. The first on what it means to research and exhibit Canadian historical art and the second on the challenges of collecting today.

Negotiations are under way with the MMFA for the long term loan of works in the collection (historical and non-canadian).

Photographic digitization of the collection will also facilitate research for students and scholars and will provide an important means to electronically promote the collection outside the university. It will also enable a series of web based projects.

Conservation

Major work to upgrade the vault so that it met Heritage Canada environmental standards was done in the summer of 2006. It involved moving the entire collection out and encasing all conduits and repainting and sealing all surfaces. (The work succeeded in stemming the penetration of Tim Horton vapours and grease particles thus saving the works from eventual degradation).

New storage equipment was purchased and installed enabling all items in the collection to be properly conserved.

C. PUBLIC PROGRAMS AND EDUCATION

Over the last four years there has been a realignment of educational and public programming priorities in relation to specific communities, and to available resources at the Gallery. Rather than offer a minimum of activities to all types of communities (young children to seniors) the Gallery decided to target in its guide program specific communities that were more closely aligned to the gallery i.e. Cegep and university students, and the general adult public of course. With that in mind contact was made with a series of teachers in Cegeps that are interested in the fine arts and packages were sent to them in the summer of 2005 so as to get a commitment towards visiting the Gallery between September and May. This program has been relatively successful with the same teachers and groups returning over the last two years and new ones also beginning to participate.

The Gallery's walk-in guide program (individual visits offered by a guide on a walk in basis) is offered in both French and English two or three times a week depending on the time of year and is popular with the general public (cultural professional and artists are less interested because of their different level of expertise).

As a university art gallery it is important that we experiment with new approaches in education and the arts. A pilot project targeting non-fine arts students is being developed and has been submitted to the CCA for funding. Another project for the next programming year involves artists who are exhibiting at the gallery developing projects from their work in collaboration with students from Concordia and from other schools.

As a university art gallery it is also important to develop the "intellectual" aspect of our public programming in order to provide forums for discussion for our specialized audience and fine arts students. Curatorial talks and panel

discussions as well as lectures are organized to discuss issues raised in our exhibitions. See "Nouvelle programmation depuis 2004" document for a list of all such activities since November 2004 .

Concerts and performances also taken place in conjunction with our exhibitions. We have also produced off-site events in Montreal nightclubs with the objective of connecting with Montreal's vibrant experimental and electronic music scene. We have presented at La Sala Rossa, Andy Warhol's 8 hour long film *Empire* accompanied by a series of local bands and sound artists. On another evening we presented the experimental sound performances of three artists at the Lion d'or.

Students are brought in to work as guides and to actively participate in developing the touring strategy with the educator.

A section was added to our web site in 2006 to provide a framework for public reflection on the current exhibition. This section is called *Ways of Thinking* or *Pistes de réflexion* in French and can be used by visitors as an aid to understanding what is being presented at the Gallery. It includes biographies, excerpts from the curator's text, commentaries with a series of questions and a bibliography. It is also directed at teachers who can download the material and use it to prepare for a visit to the Gallery. We will be producing a paper version of this resource this fall that will be available free to all who visit the gallery.

Publications are a very important part of the gallery's programming and promotion. They are a tool that allows the institution and what it does to be 'out there' in order to extend its social and cultural presence in a lasting manner: books travel in all parts of the world and have many lives. They are essential on three fronts: they inform and advance areas of knowledge and research, they are an effective image builder for the institution and Canadian art that crosses national borders, and they are a major contribution to an artist's development and career promotion. As a university art gallery we have a commitment to offering a critical framework and this is what motivates our publication program. Major exhibitions have been accompanied by publications and the collection program *Collection* and *Capsule* are each accompanied by a brochure. Publications are also designed by young designers so as to give them a distinctive profile. Two of our catalogues (*L'Écho des limbes* and *Timelength*) have won Grafika design prizes.

We want to produce more substantial publications that can bring together a set of essays. Publications are expensive to produce but we believe they are indispensable and we are cultivating partnership with other institution in order to produce these more ambitious publications.

D. PROMOTION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Recognizing that the Gallery was serving both Concordia and communities in Montréal and in order to enhance its profile in the predominantly French art community, the Gallery committed itself in 2003 to systematically produce all of its public documents and services in both English and French. The Gallery is the only entity at Concordia that is fully bilingual.

In 2003 the Gallery had its identity redesigned so as to produce an image that was more contemporary and would more effectively promote its mandate to all communities alike, and have the widest possible application.

A new poster-invitation format was devised so as to enable us to develop an identifiable presence over the long term. This format allows for the inclusion of all our information around each exhibition including educational programs and talks in both English and French.

In 2004 we undertook a complete rehaul of our web site launching a redesigned autonomous version in both English and French in the summer of 2006. The web site has received a significantly increased number of hits since its launch and we have received numerous compliments. It is being increasingly used to promote our activities here, throughout Canada and abroad.

A printed brochure is being developed to announce our programming in the fall and winter which will be distributed by mail to our public here and elsewhere.

A part-time office support position was transformed into a communications position in 2005 and work was begun to develop media contacts and to increase our electronic event mailing list (it now counts 2500 entries). Electronic reminders are sent out for each of our events, openings, conferences etc.

An audience survey was devised to assess the quality and efficacy of our services and was distributed during the winter spring of 2007 in two of our exhibitions and by electronic mail out. Analysis of the data will take place this summer.

Attempts are being made to obtain sponsorships for our events and openings with some success. (AVW Telav for media equipment, les imprimeries productions for some invitations)

The director is now a member of the Canadian Association of Museum Directors (Camdo) and of University and College Art Galleries Association (Ugacac) which meets twice yearly and provides support and advice on a wide range of issues ranging from governance to ethical collection management and copyright and artist fees. These organizations also prepare and present position papers to our funding agencies such as CCA and Heritage Canada.

E. STAFF, STUDENTS AND INTERSHIPS

In 2003 the Gallery had 1 full time permanent position (administrative assistant), 2 full time contractual positions (Director, Curatorial Assistant) and 3 part time positions (technician, educator and office assistant). An effort was made to formalize certain positions and make them full time where needed. Thus the technician position was made into a graded full time professional position and the educator position was also made full time on a long term contract.

A major endowment (secured in 2002) provided in 2004 for the creation of the position of Max Stern Curator of the collection and for the Visiting Curator of Contemporary Art as well as for the Educator position (this position however is not part of the legal agreement of the above endowment). In July 2004 the curator of the collection was hired thus allowing the curatorial assistant position to focus more on temporary exhibition installation logistic.

In 2005 the part-time office assistant position was made into a part-time communications position.

Students are hired throughout the year mostly with support from the Work Study program. Thus students work as attendants at the Gallery's reception desk during the opening hours of the Gallery and others works as exhibition guides for our Walk-in Tour program. Other students from Concordia work as research assistants. (These positions are paid).

Since 2005 an increasing number of students from other universities are soliciting internships at the Gallery as part of programs in their university. Museology students from UQAM and Université de Montréal have applied to work at the Gallery over the last two summers and students from McGill's Art History and Communications department and the Département d'Histoire de l'art of l'Université de Montréal are working on research projects at the Gallery this summer. (All these position are unpaid).

The Gallery also offers the **Pateras Internship** and the **Ann Duncan Award**. The first is linked to the DSA/DIA program at the John Molson School of Business and the second is linked to the Faculty of FA and is adressed to undergraduate students.

F. FUNDING

PUBLIC FUNDING

The Gallery has been very successful since 2004 in raising public funds from agencies in Canada. Given the significant cut backs to cultural institutions from government agencies over the last three years the Gallery has done very well. Over the last four years we have obtained \$298,500 from various public

agencies: the Canada Council for the Arts, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and Heritage Canada as well as from some private foundations (La fondation Daniel Langlois) and various foreign consulates (the Netherlands, the British Council, the Swedish Embassy and the French Consulate)

The *Canada Council for the Arts* is the gallery's lifeline in relation to program funding. Their grant is distributed on a two-year basis and allocated on a competitive peer review process. We have also been successful in obtaining funding on a project basis from le *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec*.

Heritage Canada has given us a significant grant in its Cultural Spaces program to offset the costs of the renovation work in the Gallery's vault. We have also submitted an application to HC's Museum Assistance Program for funding to offset costs linked to our collection digitization project.

La fondation Daniel Langlois contributed to the presentation of the *9 Evenings* project this spring.

Various foreign organizations in Canada have contributed to foreign artist representation at the Gallery.

UNIVERSITY ENDOWMENT FUNDING

Significant endowment funding for the Gallery was obtained over the last four years and has resulted in increasing our financial resources for the production of exhibitions, public programming and publications. Given the current cultural climate of cut backs in the public sector these endowments have helped create a security net for the Gallery.

The *10th anniversary endowment fund* established in 2002 on the occasion of the Gallery's anniversary has provided funds for the position of Max Stern Collections Curator and Visiting Curator of Contemporary Art as well as the educator position (now 4 days a week).

The following exhibition programming funds were obtained in 2004 and 2005: the *Iris Westerberg Stern Contemporary Programming Fund* and the *Samuel Schechter Exhibitions Fund*.

An art education and public programs fund was established in 2006 in recognition of Frederick and Mary Kay Lowy's support for the arts.

G. GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES

Governance issues are increasingly becoming a focus of attention on the part of the public agencies that fund us. With that in mind it was felt necessary that the Gallery equip itself with a governing structure that clearly reflected its status

within the university. Since the Gallery reports to the Office of the President as an entity of the university and has no legal status as such, the Gallery set up an Advisory Council (max. 12 members). A committee of Council members drew up appropriate guidelines to structure its activities. These guidelines were accepted by the Office of the President in the spring of 2005.

The Gallery receives an operating budget (salaries and basic gallery operation) which was updated in 2006 to reflect current spending and salaries. Yearly projection exercises have been instated since 2006. The gallery runs no deficit.

The Gallery's programming activities are reviewed and discussed by a programming committee on a yearly basis.

A number of **policies** have been drawn up over the last two years such a *Collection use* policy, *Internal and external loan* policy, a *lighting* policy, a *programming* policy. Currently a new *acquisition* policy is being drafted.

Artist, curator and writer **contracts** have also been written following Canadian Artist Representation (Carfac) guidelines.

H. GENERAL OPERATIONS, EQUIPMENT

Over the last three years an attempts has been made to modernize our office equipement with the upgrading every year of staff computers and office furniture.

Some spatial reconfigurations have taken place since 2003. The open area between the offices and the gallery was finally closed and the gallery at the back split into two spaces. Some fixed walls were extended in order to accommodate video projections and sound work. A signage wall was installed in the entrance-vestibule to announce our exhibitions.

A new alarm system linked to central security was installed. The lighting controls were changed thereby rendering usualbe inoperative lighting track.

Work was begun and is ongoing to stabilized fluctuating humidity and temperature levels in the gallery.

Until 2004 the Gallery had remained open all year round. In the summer of 2004 it was decided to close in early July for the summer. After monitering attendance and participation in the summer of 2003 the Director concluded that it was inefficient to remain open during the summer months. Ending our programming in late June has allowed the Gallery to undertake large scale conservation projects such the vault renovation etc and allowed the staff to engage in projects that the schedule of activities and operations around our programming does not permit.

The staff is also able to take their holidays without disrupting the schedule of programs.

Different **hours of operation** were tested and at this point we are open Tuesday to Friday noon to 6 pm and Saturday noon to 5 pm. We are currently looking into ways of staying open late one night a week.

Attendance has varies from one exhibition to the next but has generally increased from around 12,000 to 16,000-20,000 yearly.

CONCLUSION

*The distinctiveness of its programming, activities and publications have given a specific profile to the Gallery in Montreal and increasingly so in Canada in the field of contemporary art as well as the area of historical research. The success of this new profile is visible in **the increased attendance** to the Gallery over the last three years. We now have an annual attendance of between 16,500 to 20,000 visitors. In January and February of 2007 alone we received just over 4000 visitors.*